

My plan to increase senior property-tax relief

Did you know the senior property tax relief program actually helps 23,000 *fewer* seniors than it helped in 1996? That doesn't make sense. Seniors are struggling with higher costs for prescription drugs and other necessities. Seniors need more tax relief, not less.

Why are fewer seniors getting needed tax relief? Because the income limits for relief have not been adjusted for over five years – the longest period without an increase in eligibility since voters created senior property tax relief in the 1960s.

I'm working with Democratic and Republican lawmakers to create a bipartisan solution to the problem. Here's our proposal:

1. Increase all eligibility by \$5,000.

This would make seniors with household incomes of up to \$35,000 eligible for property tax relief. Income limits for other levels of relief would also increase by \$5,000.

2. Deductions for health insurance costs.

Seniors should be allowed to deduct health insurance payments when calculating eligibility for tax relief. The federal government allows this deduction for tax calculations. So should we.

3. Deductions for veterans' disability payments.

The federal government already allows veterans' disability payments to be deducted for tax purposes. Our state should honor veterans by allowing the same deduction for the purposes of senior tax relief.

4. Deductions for adult family home or boarding home costs.

Washington seniors can already deduct costs for nursing homes and home care when determining eligibility for senior tax relief. It's only fair to allow the same deductions for adult family homes, boarding homes and assisted living facilities.

My proposals would give an additional 50,000 seniors property tax relief!



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Special Report to Seniors Winter 2003



State Rep. Dawn Morrell

Dear Friends,
Serving the senior citizens of Pierce County is an important part of my job as a state representative. With the 2004 legislative session fast approaching, I'd like to share the top senior issues I'm working on:

- Expanding senior property-tax relief
- Preserving home care for seniors
- Implementing prescription drug reform.

Sen. Jim Kastama and I would also like to invite you to a local senior meeting, where we can meet and talk about issues that matter to you.

Please save this information:

25th District Senior Meeting

When: Saturday, January 10, 1:30 PM to 3.
Where: Puyallup library - 218 West Pioneer, in downtown Puyallup.

I hope you can make it. And please always remember that hearing from you helps me to speak for you as your representative. Together, we can make Washington a better place for senior citizens, and all citizens.

Dawn Morrell

Dawn Morrell
State Representative, 25th District

Representative Dawn Morrell

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Senior property tax relief program

Property tax relief for senior citizens has been a top personal priority since the first day I took office. We're having an impact! More and more lawmakers now agree it is time to expand senior property tax relief. This page describes Washington's *current* property tax relief program. My proposals for *expanding* senior tax relief are on a separate page.

Are you already eligible for a property tax exemption?

You may currently qualify for a senior property tax exemption if:

- You are at least 61 years old or disabled.
- You own your home or mobile home, and it is your principal place of residence.
- Your combined household income is not greater than \$30,000.

"This legislation is desperately needed. We can't handle what is being done to us."

Puyallup senior on Dawn's senior tax-relief legislation

Certain expenses for nursing home care, home care, prescription drugs and medical treatment can be deducted when calculating eligibility. You may also qualify even if you are temporarily in a hospital or nursing home and are renting your residence to someone else during your stay.

What are the current exemptions?

In addition to the following exemptions, entering the property tax relief program also freezes the assessed value of your residence, which further reduces tax bills.

Income:	Exempt from:
\$24,001 to \$30,000	All excess levies or special levies*
\$18,001 to \$24,000	Exempt from all excess or special levies <i>and</i> regular levies on the greater of \$40,000 or 35% of your homes assessed value (not to exceed \$60,000).
\$18,000 or less	Exempt from all excess or special levies <i>and</i> regular levies on the greater of \$50,000 or 60% of your home's assessed value.

* Excess or special levies require voter approval, such as school bonds.

To learn more ...

To learn more or apply for a senior property tax exemption, call the Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer's Senior Citizen and Disabled Person Exemption Hotline: **(253) 798-2169**.

Rx Reform Update

Many seniors have asked me for an update on the prescription drug reforms we fought for and won in the Legislature earlier this year. I am happy to report we're making good progress. Here is the very latest update on when key goals in our reforms will be implemented.

State buying consortium

Goal: Create a 'preferred drug' list, based on scientific evidence, that lets taxpayers save money through bulk-purchasing discounts. Doctors will still prescribe any medicines they think best, and taxpayers will save millions of dollars annually. **Target date:** March 1, 2004.

Prescription drug discount program

Goal: Make the same special prices the state achieves through bulk-purchasing of prescription drugs available to nearly 600,000 low-income persons over age 50 (those making less than 300% of the federal poverty level). A modest fee will be charged to enroll in the discount program. **Target date:** April, 2004

1-800 Pharmacy connection line

Goal: Drug manufacturers and others often offer discount prices for low-income patients. However, finding these savings can be confusing and time consuming. This one-stop, toll-free number will connect seniors and other Washington consumers with available discounts. **Target date:** January 1, 2004

Senior "brown bag" educational outreach

Goal: Create an outreach program that lets seniors bring their medications to a local senior center for free advice on getting the most out of their medicines and reducing costs. **Target date:** Winter 2003.

*Pierce County has a great **one-stop** phone number to help local senior citizens find information and services they need.*

PIERCE COUNTY SENIOR INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

Toll-free: 1-800-562-0332
(Or 253-798-4600)

Service Hours:
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Monday through Friday
(except legal holidays)

"More than 5,000 AARP members called legislators to urge support for the prescription drug bill."

AARP Washington newsletter

Preserving Home Care

Most seniors and their loved ones prefer the independence, dignity, and convenience of home care over nursing homes or other forms of long term care. Home care is also much less expensive than housing people in institutions, which means it's better for taxpayers, too.

To preserve home care as an option for more seniors, we must make sure qualified and reliable home care workers are available when seniors need them. There are simply not enough high quality care workers willing to do this skilled, difficult and emotionally draining work for low pay and no benefits.

We must do better!

To solve this problem, I proposed a law to honor the public vote on Initiative 775, which voters passed in 2001 to demand fair salaries and benefits for home care workers. AARP and other advocates for seniors strongly supported my proposal. But due to state budget problems, the Legislature funded only a fraction of I-775's goals – a mere \$8.43 an hour with no benefits. *We must do better than this to preserve home care!*

The latest proposal

The good news is that our state Health Care Authority recently negotiated a new contract with home care workers that calls for:

1. A 50-cent raise next October (for a total of \$8.93 an hour);
2. Health benefits for home care workers who work at least half time;
3. Injured-worker benefits for on-the-job injuries.

Since this contract must still be ratified by the Legislature, home care is sure to be a top issue in 2004. I promise to continue working with AARP and other senior advocates to preserve – and improve – home care for Washington's seniors.

- *Home care assistance* *\$10,000 or more per year,*
- *Assisted living housing* *\$30,000 or more per year,*
- *Nursing home care* *At least \$50,000 per year.*

Washington State Senior Citizens' Lobby



State Representative
Dawn Morrell

Senior Report

Winter 2003